

Sermon: 5th Sunday of Easter

Text: John 16:12-22 (v.16)

Theme: The church after Jesus' death

Goal: Jesus provides for the future of His church after His death/resurrection/ascension, by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Jesus is preparing His disciples for His departure. He said these words on Maundy Thursday evening, when He celebrated the Holy Communion for the very first time, and before He was betrayed by Judas on the Mount of Olives. The disciples were concerned about the Kingdom Jesus had promised them. They became completely disorientated when Jesus was put on the cross and was laid down in the grave. Jesus wanted to assure His disciples in advance that they wouldn't be alone in the future; and, despite the events of the suffering that were ahead of them, they eventually would rejoice and be glad as they would see the living Christ and as the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth and the church would be established by their work!

I – “In a little while” – the time between Jesus' death & resurrection & ascension

The disciples couldn't understand what Jesus meant when He said: “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me again.” They were arguing among themselves what it meant. Jesus came to their help and then He said that He was talking about His death and resurrection, and about the several times He would appear to them before His ascension, before He goes back to the Father. It would be always “in a while”, some glimpses of His glorious resurrected body.

If we had been there, we wouldn't have understand it either. It was something totally new, a crucified man to be alive again! Impossible! The reaction of the disciples would be of grieve and mourn, and they would weep when Jesus would die on the cross. It seemed to be the end of their hope, as the two disciples on the way to Emmaus confessed: "We had hoped that He was the One who was going to redeem Israel... and it is the third day since all this took place" (Luke 24:21).

Jesus had spoken several times about His death and resurrection, but the disciples were able to understand it only after His resurrection (John 2:22). Jesus illustrates what their reaction would be reminding them about what happens when a woman gives birth to a child: ...she "has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world".

Martin Luther wrote about death in a similar way. He said: *The womb of the mother is the only world that the baby knows. It is perfect for the child: warm, protected and safety. When the time comes to be born, it is very painful for the child and for the mother. But after the child is born, a new world full of light and love is presented to the child, and he/she doesn't want to go back to the previous world anymore. So it is with us when the time of our death comes: It's painful and full of grief; but after we pass the tunnel, we will be with God in the new world forever!* (Free quotation from A Sermon on Preparing to Die). – This is the image that Revelation 21 showed us today: The dwelling of God with men. God Himself will wipe every tear from our eyes. "There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:3-4).

Jesus said to His disciples: "So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice and no one will take away

your joy.” The joy the disciples experienced on Easter Sunday when they saw the resurrected Jesus was so big that it impelled them to go all around the world to share the good news of the resurrected Jesus and of the salvation that comes to all who believe in Him. They faced persecution and even death because of the name of Jesus and because of their hope in the resurrection and eternal life, but they didn’t give up. “No one will take away your joy!”

“In a little while” – How long do we have to wait until we will see Jesus? The time of God is not like our time. He knows the best time. If we have to mourn and to weep, be sure that this is just “for a little while” in God’s time. After suffering, the glory and joy will be forever for those who believe in the resurrected Christ!

II – “In a little while” – the time between Jesus’ ascension and His second coming.

Another strong promise of Jesus in this text is about the coming of the Holy Spirit and His task on behalf of the disciples. It took just a “little while” between Jesus’ ascension and the coming of the Holy Spirit, it took just 10 days. As the disciples were not able now to understand everything Jesus had to tell them, the Holy Spirit would be sent by the Father to “guide them into all truth...” and He would tell them what was yet to come.

We believe that whatever the Apostles preached and wrote in the Bible is the inspired Word of God. They didn’t write by themselves, but the Holy Spirit guided them what to write down, as Jesus had promised them. Peter says: “For we did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty...Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin

in the human will, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:16, 20-21).

The speech Peter addressed to the Sanhedrin, as we heard in the readings from Acts 4, shows how the Holy Spirit guided the Apostle according to the promise of Jesus. The text says: “Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: ...It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from dead...Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved... We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.” (Acts 4:8, 10, 12, 20). – “When they saw the courage of Peter and John and they realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus” (Act 4:13). What a nice witness even from the enemies: “They took note that these men had been with Jesus!” Can people see that we have been with Jesus too through our words and deeds?

Conclusion: The Holy Spirit is still working and giving support to Jesus’ followers. He speaks through the inspired Word of God and through the Sacraments and gathers those who repent and believe in Jesus. We, as St. Thomas Church, are a living sign of the power and work of the Holy Spirit. And He always lifts our eyes from the midst of sorrow and pain to Jesus’ promises of life and joy. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle – Cape Town, 28 April 2013